



Focus on "Friends"

Southeast Region Friends Group News

Note from the Regional Director

More than one thousand Friends Group members, other partners and Service employees gathered in Madison, Wisconsin in July to shepherd the next chapter in the National Wildlife Refuge System's century-plus story. The *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* conference was an exceptional week of collaboration that concluded with new Director Dan Ashe setting an ambitious schedule of work to finalize the Refuge System's vision and begin implementation for the next generation.

The Conserving the Future conference, coming 13 years after the first-ever national gathering for the Refuge System in Keystone, Colorado, which resulted in the ground-breaking Fulfilling the Promise document, represented the culmination of a great deal of work by Service staff and colleagues to renew the vision for moving forward in a changing world with a new understanding of America's demographics, advances in technology, accelerating changes in climate, and other pressures on fish and wildlife populations.

This outstanding conference featured excellent speakers, workshops, and of course networking. There were three workshops that focused on Friends issues, two that prominently featured Southeast Region Friends members. The first workshop, Friends: Advancing the Vision involved a discussion by Refuge System Chief Greg Siekaniec and NWR President Evan Hirsche. The second workshop focused on Increasing Refuge Support Via Friends Groups and the primary speaker was Ann Smith from Friends of Black Bayou NWR. The last workshop, Friends Groundswell:



The Regional Director's Honor Awards recognizes individuals and teams who work for the Service. The 2011 Friends Group of the Year award was given to Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society, Alligator River NWR; accepted by President Stanly Oliver and Volunteer Coordinator Abbey Reibel. Credit: USFWS

Reaching Capacity, focused on how to grow Friends membership and one of the primary speakers was Birgie Vertesch from the Ding Darling Society.

Director Ashe made clear a goal to finalize the work on the vision document by October when we mark National Wildlife Refuge Week, and set the stage for the most crucial work of implementing the vision's two dozen recommendations. The Director has already chartered an executive oversight committee and has commissioned teams to help implement recommendations related to urban wildlife refuges, strategic growth, and leadership development.

It was great to see many of you and visit, if only briefly. I want to thank all of our Friends that provide incredible support to the Service and our refuge system. Together with refuge staff, amazing work

is accomplished, whether staffing visitor centers, performing maintenance work, conducting wildlife surveys, building relationships with other community leaders, or helping to be a face to the public that visits these special treasures we call national wildlife refuges.

I want to end by encouraging you all to take some time to visit the web site that supports this work. As the process moves forward, you can stay connected by visiting these web links. To check out the near-final draft vision document you can read it here: <http://bit.ly/nmWMHn>. To read more about the conference, visit <http://americaswildlife.org>. To watch video clips from many of the speakers, you can click either of these links: <http://youtube.com/americaswildlife> or <http://americaswildlife.org/multimedia>.

- Cindy

Note from Linda Kelsey- Assistant Regional Director – Fisheries Program



Region 4 ARD Linda Kelsey explains the economic impact the Hatchery has on the community. Credit: USFWS

As we near the end of summer and look to the fall (and a new fiscal year for our Agency), I am reminded again how incredibly important our Friends Groups are to us. I am proud to be from a Region with a strong, supportive network of Friends that extends across programs and across the Southeast. Our Friends do powerful work on our behalf, and in these tough budget times, their presence is more important than ever.

Friends Groups at Norfolk National Fish Hatchery (NFH), Wolf Creek NFH and Chattahoochee Forest NFH have been extremely supportive of our mitigation hatcheries as they face potential funding reductions in the President's 2012 budget. They brought their concerns, and the concerns of their communities, to the attention of our partners, the media, the Administration, and Congress.

Friends Groups at Warm Springs NFH, Natchitoches NFH, Norfolk NFH and Chattahoochee Forest NFH have sponsored terrific events this summer designed to help reconnect people with nature. An annual youth fishing event sponsored by the Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc., drew more than 1,300 young people this past June and is one of the largest events of its kind in the country. James Gray, the hatchery manager there, was recently selected as the 2011 Federal Land Manager of the Year

for the Service. This award is given annually as part of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Take Pride in America program. James was honored for his contribution to our public lands and for his effort in utilizing volunteers in creative and innovative ways. James, his staff, and the Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc., are the driving forces behind one of the largest and most successful volunteer programs in the National Fish Hatchery System.

New Friends Groups are in the process of being formed across the Southeast Region, including one at Mammoth Spring NFH where a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified "green" Aquatic Conservation and Education Center will open next spring. This great momentum for the creation of new Friends Groups at Fisheries field stations has been spurred by their great need--with increasing demands on aquatic resources and habitats across our Region, and declining budgets for the work we do. This momentum has been encouraged by the support of the National Fisheries Friends Partnership (NFFP), an organization dedicated to fostering Fisheries Friends Groups at Service facilities across the country.

NFFP is getting ready to launch a new mentoring program this fall to continue to support existing groups and help create new ones. NFFP's non-profit tax status enables it to serve as an umbrella organization for individual Friends Groups, which helps clear a huge hurdle for many fledgling groups and helps them move forward much more quickly. Leon Alexander, president of the Friends of Norfolk National Fish Hatchery, was recently selected to serve on the board of directors for NFFP. We congratulate him and know that he will represent our Region well.

The level of commitment, involvement, advocacy and support from our Friends continuously impresses me. They have greatly enhanced the ability of the Fisheries Program to go above and beyond in serving the American people. I am personally very grateful to have you as Friends. Thank you!

-Linda

Calendar of Events

September 10

"The Hatchery Outdoor Adventure"

The Friends of the Norfolk National Fish Hatchery will host a special event to showcase the hatchery.

For more information visit <http://www.norfolkhatcheryfriends.org/>

September 24

National Public Lands Day

The Department of the Interior is waiving admission fees at national parks, all 553 national wildlife refuges and the 245 million acres of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management for National Public Lands Day.

October 2

Tour St. Vincent NWR

Tour the island of St. Vincent with Friends of St. Vincent NWR.

For more information visit <http://www.stvincentfriends.com/>

October 9 - 16

Refuge Week

Vinyl banners – which can be used outdoors or inside, and carry the slogan, "Visit Your National Wildlife Refuges, America's Great Outdoors" – will be mailed to each staffed refuge in late August or early September. Additionally, a Refuge Week tool kit, including fill-in-the-blank press release and a sample letter to the editor, will be mailed around the same time.

For more information, contact Martha Nudel in the Branch of Communications (703/358 1858, Martha_Nudel@fws.gov).

November 8-12

Juried Art Contest - Loxahatchee Visions

The Friends of Loxahatchee NWR are sponsoring a juried art contest and show. The contest is open to all artists. Each artist may submit one or two works of art, inspired by "Loxahatchee Visions". Any media or mixed media may be used, with the exception of photography.

For a complete list of rules and entry form visit <http://www.loxahatcheefriends.com>

Fisheries News

New Addition to National Fisheries Friends Partnership

Leon Alexander, President and Co-Founder of the Friends of the Norfolk National Fish Hatchery, was recently selected to serve on the board of directors of the National Fisheries Friends Partnership (NFFP). Leon brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position, and has been a leading voice in advocacy for mitigation hatcheries.



He was the Arkansas Wildlife Federation 2007 Water Conservationist of the Year, and the Southern Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers 2008 Man of the Year. He is also a recipient of the USFWS Southeast Regional Director's Volunteer of

Leon Alexander has recently been selected to serve on the NFFP board of directors. Credit: USFWS

the Year award. Congratulations to Leon, and we are proud to have him represent Fisheries Friends from the Southeast Region!

Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc Donates Children's Books to Elementary School Libraries

by Amanda Patrick, USFWS



James Gray, Project Leader; Jerry Coleman, President, Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. (far right) and Johanna Spencer, Administrative Assistant, Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. (second from right) are all smiles with Beckie Godby, Librarian, Jamestown Elementary, and students as books are delivered to the school. Credit: Jennifer Blakey, Jamestown Elementary

Due to such positive feedback received from last year's donation of children's books to the Russell County Public Library, the Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc continued this effort of inspiring a connection with nature in children by presenting \$200 in children's books to each of the four elementary school libraries in the Russell County School District. All of the books relate directly

to fish, fishing, animals, plants or another nature facet. The books will be used for everyday check out along with being utilized for story hours, special themed programs and more. The Friends Group placed book plaques inside each book with the Friends Group information. Librarians at each school will set up a display to highlight the Friends Group donation.

Tip of the Quarter

Building and Expanding Your Friends Group

by Birgie Vertesch, Executive Director, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

Having a strong, active and successful Friends group is a real partnership between the Refuge and the Friends of the Refuge. That partnership is built on respect and trust for one another and the understanding that the Friends are there purely for support of the refuge and its needs.

In 2010, a total of \$291 Billion dollars was raised in philanthropy from individuals, corporations and foundations. The reasons people give are varied, but one that is most important to remember is "that they were asked". As I always say to our board, "if you don't ask, you don't receive". Of the billions of dollars raised, the majority (87%) came directly from individuals. While it's important to develop relationships with corporations

and foundations, it is vital to recognize the power of the individual in the area of philanthropy.

There are a number of different ways Friends Groups can raise money, but in order to do so effectively, a good and accurate database of names and addresses is essential. How do you obtain these names and addresses? You can buy lists, but the least expensive way would be to ask board members and volunteers to give you their membership rosters from neighborhoods; churches; parent school organizations, golf clubs; social service clubs etc. and have a volunteer enter them into a database. Do you collect the names and addresses of people who visit the refuge? Offer a free gift at

special events where people have to leave a business card or complete a form with addresses. Take that information and put it into your database. If you don't already have an existing database, there are numerous options available. From your basic excel and Microsoft office software to the more formalized donor software such as Donor Perfect and Raisers Edge. Information is golden and without accurate information it is very difficult to raise much needed support to protect our wildlife and educate others about the importance of the work at the refuge.

In the next issue of this newsletter, we'll discuss what you can do with your database of names, along with some sample solicitation letters.

Refuge News

Friends Receive Everyday Grant

by Bryon Fortier, USFWS

The Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, Inc. (FLWR) was one of only two National Wildlife Refuge Friends Groups to receive awards from The National Environmental Education Foundation's (NEEF) Every Day Grants program. The program awards grants to Friends Groups at national, state, local, and private sites nationwide.

The partnership between the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex and FLWR has been vital to many successful projects and programs on the eight refuges of the Complex. The establishment of the Refuge Complex' new visitor center, support of the internship program on the refuges, creation and improvement of new trails and facilities for visitors, support of the canoe tour program, vigorous involvement in the many special events held each year throughout the Complex, and consistent recruitment of volunteer support for many other projects has paid big dividends for the group and for the Service. Many of FLWR's achievements have been aided by their aggressive pursuit of grant funds from a variety of organizations.

After successfully rebuilding their organization since the dislocation of Hurricane Katrina, FLWR is committed to further revitalization and moving forward. An important way to do this is to develop an improved system for regular community outreach that will provide a platform to maintain relationships with current members and to develop relationships with potential new members.

The group is eager to replace hand-me-down computers, update software, and refine its membership database. With the \$5,000 NEEF award, The Friends will purchase computers and necessary software that will create, maintain and track information on members, volunteers and donors. To complement these upgrades, the publication of a new and updated membership brochure is also planned using the NEEF award.



Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, Inc. Credit: Roy Rogge

Check It Out

Invite Volunteers for National Public Lands Day

by Jessica Jones, National Environmental Education Foundation

Is your Friends Group planning its volunteer schedule for September? Consider being part of the nationwide celebration of public lands and hosting a volunteer event on National Public Lands Day!

National Public Lands Day (NPLD) is the nation's largest one-day volunteer event for public lands. This year it occurs on Saturday, September 24th, and over 2,000 public lands are expected to host volunteer events. Many of the events on

NPLD are organized by local Friends Groups that collaborate with public land managers to lead trash pick-ups, invasive species removals, trail building and erosion control projects. Register an event at www.publiclandsday.org.

NPLD volunteers on federal lands, such as national refuges or fish hatcheries, are eligible to receive fee-free coupons. The coupons provide volunteers free entry into one BLM, National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Forest Service or FWS public land for one day. Coupons will only be mailed to federal public land employees, so when registering your site at www.publiclandsday.org put your FWS contact's name and mailing address.

NPLD is a program of the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF). Earlier this year, NEEF's Every Day Grants program awarded 22 Friends Groups grants of up to \$5,000 each for capacity building projects. Friends of the Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, Inc. was one of the recipients. Sign up for NPLD's newsletter: <http://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin/ea?v=0011ZF-NU4nD5jCLPoLXjq2Fg%3D%3D> to receive updates as to the next Every Day Grants cycle and news about NPLD.

For more information on National Public Lands Day, contact Jessica Jones, coordinator of NPLD, at 202/261 6478 or jjones@neefusa.org.



Friends clean-up during a National Public Lands Day event. Credit: National Environmental Education Foundation

Two Perspectives of the Vision Conference

Aligning Friends Priorities with Those of the Refuge

by Joanna Webb, National Friends Coordinator

Stirring, encouraging and motivating are the ways Friends have described the Refuge System's Conserving the Future conference July 11-14 in Madison, Wisconsin. About 75 Friends attended.

From my perspective as the national Friends' coordinator, I would add productive. Friends and staff were afforded a special opportunity to have an open discussion with Greg Siekaniec, then chief of the Refuge System and now deputy director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, about the Refuge System's Friends program. Some expressed concern regarding the future level of funding for the Refuge System as they posed questions to Greg about the national mentoring program, and Friends' liaison and volunteer coordinator positions. "You will need to think about your vision as a Friends group and focus on your priorities," Greg responded. "We recognize that the fiscal situation may well be tough for the federal government – and the Refuge System – in coming years."

Friends at the conference participated in several facilitated discussions pertaining to vision recommendation #11: "Develop and nurture community partnerships so every refuge or refuge complex has a friends group." Participants were asked for their thoughts on the recommendation as well as how the vision could be turned into a reality in 10 years.

Overwhelmingly, participants voiced their desire to see investments in programs to support existing Friends Groups, expanding programs to include refuge staffs that have Friends' partnerships, and diversifying support for on-line accessibility, and a variety of other excellent suggestions.

The Refuge System is now implementation bound. The vision will be refined into a final document by mid-October to reflect the additional input received at the conference. Until then, Friends should do as Greg suggested, "focus on priorities and how to achieve them." Tell the Refuge System how Friends can be supported. Look for additional opportunities to strengthen communication with refuge staff.

The next decade is going to present many challenges. But, Refuge System deputy chief Jim Kurth said at the conference, tough times historically have presented huge opportunities.

Consider a few other wise points made at the conference. "Spend at least 25% of your time thinking and strategizing", said Rick Coleman, assistant regional director for refuges, Mountain-Prairie Region. "Life is not about finding the right answer. It's about finding the next right answer," said Dewitt Jones, photographer and



Greg Siekaniec (far left), National Friends Coordinator Joanna Webb, Director of Grassroots NWRA Joan Patterson, and NWRA President Evan Hirsche (far right) pose after their workshop during the Vision Conference. Credit: Neal McLain

inspirational speaker. Dewitt also urged us all to embrace the words, "carpe diem," or "seize the day," every day of our lives.

All these and more are reasons to feel hopeful about the future of the Refuge System. We have more Friends and partners than ever. I see so much passion every day in the people of the Refuge System, and I was overwhelmed by the amount of interest expressed for our Friends program at the conference. Let's work together like never before to align the Friends program priorities with those of the refuges they tirelessly support.

If you didn't attend the conference, videos of speeches and workshops are available on www.Americaswildlife.org.

My Thoughts: Reflections on the Vision Conference

by Joan Patterson, Director of Grassroots Outreach, NWRA

"Celebrate what's right with the World!" Those are the words of Dewitt Jones, one of the inspiring keynote speakers at the Conserving the Future Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. The conservation of wildlife and its habitat for current and future generations is something that's right with the World. Over the last year the Service with its partners, including the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and Friends, has spent much time and energy focusing on strategies for the next decade that will ensure the Refuge System fulfills its mission of conserving wildlife and its habitats for future generations.

Friends, thank you for being involved in this process. Last fall, you took part in the Vision webinars NWRA hosted, you shared your ideas and you participated in discussions on the Vision website. Last month, Friends from Region 4 and the rest of the nation continued the conversation during the Vision Conference. It was an empowering opportunity for Friends and Service employees to sit together and discuss refinements and strategies for implementing the recommendations in the vision document. (<http://americaswildlife.org/vision/>)

(continued)

My Thoughts: Reflections on the Vision Conference (continued)

Friends, you empower yourselves and each other constantly! At this conference, just as with any gathering of Friends, you listened, shared, and encouraged. Ann Smith, from Friends of Black Bayou, presented to us a workshop for Friends and the Service on how to increase support of the Refuge System using Friends groups. Birgie Vertesch, from the Ding Darling Wildlife Society, shared with us the steps for increasing membership and your donor base. Over the next few weeks, the videos of all the workshops will be available on www.americaswildlife.org.

We face tough times. Secretary Salazar impressed upon us that the Refuge System will feel the impacts of these turbulent times. The System will face staff reductions, program cutbacks, and refuges closing to the public. Given these challenges we are fortunate that the Service took the time now to update the vision for the future of America's national wildlife refuges.

We need to pull together, draw on our combined strengths, and find all the possible right answers to the challenges the refuge system will face. Friends have an amazing capacity to find those right answers, when working with refuge staff to define challenges and brainstorm solutions. Finding the right answers is something you do for each other anytime you have an opportunity to network. NWRA and the Service are working to expand that opportunity. We are developing an online hub to make it easier for Friends to connect with each other and provide resources to help you fulfill your mission. More information of this project will be forthcoming shortly.

The conservation of wildlife and its habitat will always face many challenges. Friends will be there to help the Service meet these challenges, because Friends are part of what is so right about the refuge system.

If you would like to be part of NWRA's network of individuals supporting the Refuge System, please contact me, Joan Patterson, at jpatterson@refugeassociation.org or 202/292 2422.



Friends and Refuge staff working together for success - Wendy Schnapp, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society board member (L); Wayne Boyd, Friend & Donor (C); and Toni Westland, Lead Refuge Ranger (R), Credit: Birgie Vertesch